

# LEARN

# Alive!

Libraries Empower All to Read Now

Adult Literacy Program

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March 08

## NEW FACES BRING A FRESH START TO L.E.A.R.N.



From Left to Right: Janice Wilhelm, Erica Abbey, Hector Ortega, Curtis Luster Sr., Jason Romano, and Kevin Vigil

L.E.A.R.N., the San Diego County Library's Adult Literacy Program, has undergone some staff changes in the last couple of months. That means some great things will be happening as new people equal new ideas.

Janice Wilhelm, the Coordinator of the Adult Literacy Program, came to L.E.A.R.N. a year ago with a background as a librarian and previously as a systems analyst. Currently, she is studying educational technology at SDSU with a focus on assistive technology. Janice believes that technology is a great tool to break down barriers caused by distance or disabilities. She also believes that education is a life-long mission, and that we all have the capacity to improve and empower ourselves through learning.

Erica Abbey, one of our AmeriCorps members, is

serving at the El Cajon Branch. Erica is originally from Calgary, Alberta, Canada but has also lived in Phoenix, Arizona and Hong Kong. She has spent the last seven years working in hospitality and has a true spirit to learn and serve others in the field of literacy.

Hector Ortega is one of the new Library Associates in Vista. Before coming to us, Hector worked in Library Headquarters for almost a year as Library Technician I in the cataloging department, where he also started working with the Language Team of translators. Hector has earned a BA in Spanish, an MA in linguistics, as well as an English/Spanish translation

certificate, all from San Diego State University, where he taught introductory Spanish courses as a graduate student.

Curtis Luster, Sr. came into adult learning programs in 1988 following a surgery that left him with chronic pain. His goals were to develop his memory and focus to regain his reading and writing skills. After working with a volunteer tutor for 2 years, he enrolled in Mira Costa College and later transferred to Palomar College where he graduated with an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts in 2001. Curtis then graduated in 2006 with a Bachelor's Degree in Human Development from California State University, San Marcos. Curtis has since returned to the Adult Literacy Program as an AmeriCorps member. He continues to serve his second consecutive term at the Vista Branch.

Jason Romano, also a new Library Associate in Vista, happens to come to us from the Windy City (Chicago, Illinois); however, he has resided in San Diego now for almost two years, and we are very happy to have him join our team. Like Hector, Jason has his BA in Spanish and MA in Linguistics. For the last several years, he has been

teaching English as a Second Language [E.S.L.], and his expertise in this field will be of great help to our learners who have just started learning English or are looking to improve their communication skills.

Lastly, Kevin Vigil came to L.E.A.R.N. and the San Diego County Library from Denver nearly three years ago. Passionate about educating and empowering people, Kevin has worked in the non-profit sector as a community organizer and in the public schools as a volunteer, teacher's aide, and elementary school teacher. He is proud of L.E.A.R.N.'s growth and welcomes the challenge of continuing to build an exceptional program geared toward eradicating illiteracy.

As each member of the staff is an essential part of the process, you too can get involved. We are always looking to increase the number of our tutors and learners; if you know anyone interested in helping or in need of assistance, please contact L.E.A.R.N. Our collaborative efforts will lead to a brighter future. So bright, *you gotta wear shades!*

*"Reading changes your life and how you spend your time. Learning is an individual choice and can only be determined by the need to improve future opportunities. You will find a way to improve reading, writing, and spelling skills to become a better reader. Be encouraged, build self-esteem, confidence, and character to transform self-empowerment through literacy development. Build vocabulary and change your life one word at a time!"*

-- Curtis Luster, Sr.

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## A FOUNDER'S FAREWELL

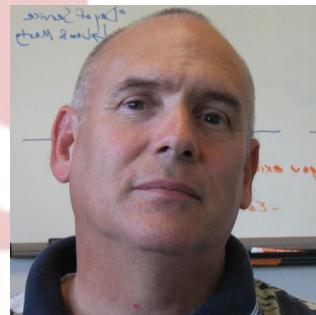
### DATES TO REMEMBER:

- **Tutor Trainings**
  - *El Cajon (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> part separate)*  
*March 19 and 20 (5:30pm-8:00pm)*
  - *El Cajon (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> part together)*  
*April 19 (10:00am-4:00pm)*
  - *Encinitas (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> part separate)*  
*April 22 and 23 (5:30pm-8:00pm)*
- **Learner Time**
  - *March 19 (6:00pm- 7:00pm)*
  - *April 16 (6:00pm- 7:00pm)*
  - *May 21 (6:00pm- 7:00pm)*
- **ESL Café**
  - *Vista*  
*March 12 and 26 (10:30am-12:00pm)*  
*April 9 and 23 (10:30am-12:00pm)*
  - *El Cajon*  
*March 21 (12:00pm-1:30pm)*  
*April 4 and 18 (12:00pm-1:30pm)*
- **Race for Literacy**
  - *May 3 - Kids Magic Mile*
  - *May 4 - 8K Race*

When L.E.A.R.N. Alive! launched in the spring of 2006, its parent organization was pretty much fending for itself. Four motley, relatively untested souls (former L.E.A.R.N. coordinator Amanda Schukle, library associate Kevin Vigil, and AmeriCorps ex-volunteers Liam Kerr and myself) converged on an office the size of a tie tack, and the phrase "Vista Satellite" may as well have referred to an over funded NASA orbiter – such was the state of progress on the vaunted L.E.A.R.N. venue in North County.

But as Amanda eloquently put it, "the stars were aligned" amid our sense of purpose and fun. We'd complete a staggering number of assignments in a surprisingly short time, thanks in no small part to

late-year AmeriCorps addition Misa Aldenderfer and her legendary industriousness. L.E.A.R.N. Alive! was our way of electronically charting that path every



month. The problem was that L.E.A.R.N. hadn't yet come into its own, and the stories suffered from a certain insularity. While the content showed that the organization was hard at work, it contained very little on the people that have begun to define the group.

Clearly, it's a different day. The opening of the Vista site last year has helped fuel a decided jump in manpower; a much-needed ESL program continues to take shape; and I've lost very close to 863 pounds. These developments only begin to reflect those on the horizon, and a new crop of L.E.A.R.N. Alive! writers and editors is in business accordingly. As a former AmeriCorps volunteer and the newsletter's founding publisher, I can only wish them the greatest success as they focus on L.E.A.R.N.'s efforts to promote literacy in San Diego County – the insidious, noble work of the individuals who tirelessly give of themselves in a testament otherwise unsung.

-- Martin Jones Westlin

## INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT LITERACY

The Race for Literacy is fast approaching. The annual run or walk races are taking place on May 3rd and May 4th in Balboa Park. This event is sponsored by the Union-Tribune and will feature a Kids Magic Mile on the first day and an 8K Race on the second day. Last year, more than 8,000 people

participated in the weekend event. Like last year, all proceeds that are raised from the event will contribute to the literacy programs of the San Diego Council on Literacy.

Those not interested in running and/or walking in the race may want to consider volunteering. Mr. Cruz mentioned that they still need 350

people to volunteer. If you are interested in participating this year, please contact L.E.A.R.N. at [learn-staff@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:learn-staff@sdcounty.ca.gov). This will be a great way to participate in an event that is fun and supports literacy in San Diego.



## OUR NEWEST AMERICORPS MEMBER

Liliana Cilia is the newest member of the L.E.A.R.N. team. She is originally from Argentina, where she taught Spanish to children and adults. She joins us as an AmeriCorps member and will be working at the Vista Branch. As one part of her AmeriCorps contribution, she plans on tutoring learners of Spanish.

AmeriCorps is an American network of more than 3,000 non-profit organizations, public agencies, faith-based and community organizations (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/programs/americorps.asp>). AmeriCorps was created in 1993 by President Bill Clinton and helps meet critical needs in education, public safety, health and the environment. AmeriCorps members sign up for a year of service and earn a meager living allowance. Promoting literacy is just one of the many opportunities for AmeriCorps members to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others. We appreciate all the work our AmeriCorps members do because without them, our program would not be the success that it is.

